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Is Belltown ready for a kid-friendly makeover?

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As a mother, Lara Moody can't imagine living in Belltown. Without public schools, parks or a community center, Belltown is no match for her neighborhood in North Seattle.

"Belltown needs a place for children to play," she said. "There should be more family-friendly activities."



Photos by Sam Bennett

Above-ground parking garages like this one at Second and Vine create what Seattle City Council member Peter Steinbrueck calls "dead zones" on city streets. He wants to restrict above-grade parking to two stories.

With avenues lined with restaurants, boutiques, night clubs and hair salons, Belltown is a haven for young professionals and empty-nesters. While wine-tastings at Seattle Cellars and short strolls to Benaroya Hall make Belltown appealing to some, others are unhappy with the lack of kid-friendly parks and schools.

"Belltown is accepted by empty nesters, but where have the children gone?" said Seattle City Council member Peter Steinbrueck. "It doesn't have community-oriented qualities. A trendy, hip nightspot does not make a healthy neighborhood."

Steinbrueck's critique of Belltown's shortcomings comes as the City Council begins to consider height and density changes for downtown. He said the city has unfinished work in Belltown and should

not neglect its obligation to add amenities to one of the state's densest and fastest growing neighborhoods.

He also said mistakes made in Belltown during the building boom of the last 10 years should not be repeated as the council considers new development standards for other parts of downtown.

For example, Steinbrueck said the city should allow only two levels of parking above ground. He also said the design review process should set standards for adding family-friendly features to open spaces and parks.

To make downtown attractive to families, he wants a full-block park in Belltown. Belltown's only park, Regrade Park at Third and Bell, has been converted into a dog park. He said Myrtle Edwards Park and the unfinished Olympic Sculpture Park are not central.

The neighborhood will get a long-awaited community center, following city approval last month of funding for a \$1.7 million center on the ground floor of the Belltown View Apartments at First and Wall.

Steinbrueck would also like to see the area get townhouse units with entries at the ground floor, and parking in the back. Finally, he wants the city to negotiate with Seattle Public Schools for one or more schools downtown, including one in Belltown.

John Pehrson, a Belltown resident and member of the Belltown Community Council's Housing & Land Use Subcommittee, said his neighborhood needs a park built near cafes or a library annex. "What's missing in Belltown is open space," he said.

Pehrson agreed with Steinbrueck that Belltown doesn't have amenities for families. "I don't think it's a good place to raise kids," he said. "When they get to be 6 or 8, they move out."

Steinbrueck estimated there are 200 to 300 children living in downtown Seattle — one-tenth the number living in downtown Vancouver, B.C.



Jeff Underwood and Lara Moody walk Moody's 10-month-old son, Finn, in Belltown. Moody said Belltown is a nice place to visit, but notes that it lacks parks and play areas.

"If we can attract families to downtown, then they won't move to the suburbs," he said. "We must create a community setting."

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